

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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TAGS: PINT, U.K. (N.I.)

SUBJECT: CONVENTION ELECTION MAY 1

REF: (A) BELFAST 137 (B) BELFAST 134 (C) BELFAST 130

1. SUMMARY: VOTER APATHY WILL LIKELY MEAN LIGHTER TURN OUT IN NORTHERN IRELAND CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION ELECTION MAY 1. LARGELY-HARDLINE UNIONISTS UNITED IN OPPOSITION TO POWER-SHARING AT EXECUTIVE LEVEL EXPECTED WIN MAJORITY OF 78 SEATS ALTHOUGH ALLIANCE PARTY LEADER DISPUTES THIS. LARGEST CHATOLIC-ORIENTED PARTY WILL DO WELL MAINTAIN ITS ASSEMBLY REPRESENTATION AND REPUBLICAN CLUBS WITH NON-SECTARIAN CAMPAIGN COULD WIN VOICE IN CONVENTION WITH TWO SEATS. END SUMMARY.

2. THERE ABOUT ONE MILLION ELIGIBLE VOTERS NORTHERN IRELAND. MANY OF THESE WILL GO TO POLES TOMORROW TO CHOOSE BY PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION AND SINGLE TRANSFERRABLE VOTE SYSTEM 78 DELEGATES TO CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION FROM AMONG 165 CANDIDATES IN 12 (PARLIAMENTARY) CONSTITUENCIES. SOME GROUPS CONCERNED BY "APATHY" OF VOTERS WHICH MAY CUT TURNOUT TO BELOW THE 72 PER CENT IN 1973 POLL FOR ASSEMBLY. ACCORDING ANALYSTS "APATHY" HAS TWO ROOT CAUSES: (A) VOTERS BORED BY FOURTH ELECTION IN EIGHTEEN
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MONTHS (B) VOTERS EXPECT LITTLE CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED IN CONVENTION

AND WILL NOT BOTHER VOTE TO ELECT DELEGATES. THERE THIRD FACTOR THAT COULD ACCOUNT FOR LOWER TURNOUT IN CALLS FOR BOYCOTT FROM PROVISIONAL SINN FEIN AND IRISH REPUBLICAN SOCIALIST PARTY.

3. THERE FEW DEVIATIONS FROM MANIFESTOES (REF TELS) DURING CAMPAIGN. NORTHERN IRELAND LABOUR PARTY HAS NEVER ISSUED FORMAL MANIFESTO BUT ITS SIX CANDIDATES CAMPAIGNING FOR: (A) LOCAL ASSEMBLY (B) COMMITTEE DIRECTION OF GOVERNMENT AGENCIES WITH, (C) COMMITTEES HEADS AS EXECUTIVE OR CABINET, (D) NO GROUP SHOULD HAVE VETO OVER ESTABLISHMENT REGIONAL STRUCTURES PROVIDED STRUCTURES INCLUSIVE ALL SECTIONS POLITICAL OPINION, (E) IRISH REPUBLIC MUST DROP TERRITORIAL CLAIM TO NORTHERN IRELAND AND, (F) PROGRESSIVE REDUCTION ROLE BRITISH ARMY MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVE AND IMPARTIAL LOCAL POLICE FORCE.

4. CAMPAIGNERS OF THREE SEPARATE PARTIES IN LOYALIST UNITED ULSTER UNIONIST COALITION (UUUC) ADHERED CLOSELY TO COMMON VIEWS AND TO MANIFESTO ALTHOUGH SOME OBSERVERS SEE OFFICIAL UNIONISTS UNDER HARRY WEST EVOLVING MORE TOWARD CONCILIATION THAN EITHER PAISLEY'S DEMOCRATIC UNIONISTS OR CRAIG'S VANGUARD UNIONISTS. THIS IS HIGHLY QUALIFIED EVOLUTION, IF ANY, AND ATTACHMENT TO BRITISH PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM (MAJORITY RULE), OPPOSITION TO POWER SHARING WITH MINORITY AND OPPOSITION TO ANY FORMALIZED IRISH DIMENSION ARE UNIVERSALLY HELD IN COALITION. SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND LABOUR PARTY (SDLP) ALLIANCE PARTY AND UNIONIST PARTY OF NORTHERN IRELAND (UPNI) ARE ALIKE COMMITTED TO PARTNERSHIP IN GOVERNMENT BUT DIFFER STRONGLY WITH REGARD TO IRISH DIMENSION. SDLP, APPARENTLY RECONCILED TO SECTARIAN VOTE PATTERN, HAS, RECENTLY REVIVED EMPHASIS ON INSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION OF IRISH DIMENSION. AMONG "UNIONIST" PARTIES UPNI ALONE ATTEMPTING WIDEN DEBATE TO INCLUDE ECONOMIC ISSUES SUCH AS E.E.C. AND LEVEL UNEMPLOYMENT. REPUBLICAN CLUBS HAVE RUN MOST INTERESTING CAMPAIGN IN SOME RESPECTS. THEY MAKING NON-SECTARIAN, NON-NATIONAL APPEAL FOR WORKING CLASS SOLIDARITY TOWARD ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL REFORM. THEY COULD WELL SEE THEIR MANIFESTO DEMAND FOR BILL OF RIGHTS BEAR FRUIT. THIS CAMPAIGN TOGETHER WITH BOYCOTT EFFORT IN CATHOLIC AREAS COULD COST SDLP SEATS. NORTHERN IRELAND GOVERNMENT HAS SCRUPULOUSLY CONFINED ELECTION ACTIVITY TO EDUCATIONAL PRESS AND TELEVISION

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CAMPAIGN EXPLAINING METHOD OF VOTING AND NATURE OF CONVENTION.

5. BELFAST BOOKIES ARE REFUSING BETS ON OUTCOME ELECTION. THEY BELIEVE PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION TOO COMPLICATED FOR ESTABLISHMENT SENSIBLE ODDS. UUUC CANDIDATES PREDICTING THEY WILL WIN MAJORITY OF 78 SEATS. SO FAR ONLY ALLIANCE PARTY LEADER NAPIER HAS PUBLICLY CHALLENGED THIS VIEW. HE CLAIMED APRIL 29 ALLIANCE WOULD INCREASE ITS ASSEMBLY REPRESENTATION FROM 8 TO

11 SEATS AND THAT UUUC WOULD NOT RPT NOT ACHIEVE MAJORITY (40)
IN CONVENTION. HOWEVER MUCH MODERATES WOULD APPROVE SIGNIFICANCE
OF THIS AS SHIFT TOWARD REASON IT DOES NOT RPT NOT APPEAR LIKELY
OCCUR. NORTHERN IRELAND VOTERS WILL PROBABLY AGAIN VOTE FOR THE
FAMILIAR NAMES AND THE TRADITIONAL LOYALTIES. SKILLFULL PLACEMENT
BY LOYALISTS OF CANDIDATES IN CONSTITUENCIES AND SOPHISTICATED
TACTICS WITH REGARD TO SINGLE TRANSFERRABLE VOTE ("VOTE FOUR, NO
MORE") WILL HELP THEM. ALTHOUGH NAPIER JOINED BY ANOTHER ASTUTE
OBSERVER WHO PREDICTED DEADLOCK WITH UUUC GETTING 39 SEATS
CONSENSUS IS THAT UUUC WILL WIN MAJORITY: 40-43 SEATS (INCLUDING
PAISLEY, CRAIG, WEST, JOHN TAYLOR, GLENN BARR, ERNEST BAIRD,
ROY BRADFORD), SDLP 17-19 (INCLUDING FITT, DEVLIN, VURRIE),
ALLIANCE 5 OR 6, REPUBLICANS CLUBS ONE OR 2, NILP (BLEAKLEY) 1,
INDEPENDENT (CONATY) 1, UPNI 5-7 (FAULKNER).
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